

CONVERSations

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volume

12.1



WISDOM & AGING

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IN KEEPING WITH THE IDEA OF THE SOUL AS A UNIQUE REPRESENTATION OF UNITY AND DIVERSITY, THE FORMAT OF CONVERSATIONS INCLUDES FIVE CONTINUING THEMES, EACH REPRESENTING AN ENDURING ASPECT OF THE SOUL—THOUGHT, EMOTION, BEHAVIOR, RELATIONSHIP, AND INTENTION.

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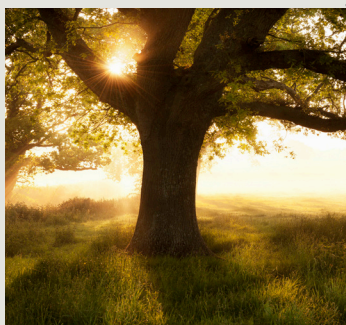
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OLDER & WISER

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CONVERSATIONS GUIDE

BY ROBERT RIFE



JOURNEY INTO JOY

TREVOR HUDSON



In *Journey Into Joy*, Trevor Hudson is opening his life to us and reveals in so doing that it is much more common to experience heart-change through an encounter with a radical life than a radical idea. The backdrop for his existential crisis was Dallas Willard's claim that God is the most joyous entity in the universe.

For Hudson this was a red flag. How could a God of love and righteousness be joyous in the face of the heinous inequality, misdeeds, and human tragedy of his apartheid-ridden South Africa? He found himself in a theological pickle.

A consistently joyful Dallas illustrated for Hudson a picture of a joyful God who dwelled deeply in this man he so admired. Of Willard, he boasts, "there was a contagious joy about his presence.... It led me to rethink my picture of God and

to reshape my way of life." In returning to the Scriptures, Dallas Willard's life in Christ was confirmed in the Christ of the Gospels. The suffering Savior and the joyful God weren't mutually exclusive concepts. This rediscovery led him to celebrate more joyfully his own existence and develop a more celebrative lifestyle. Finally, he would seek God in all things, the extraordinary in the everyday.

A wonderful spiritual friendship with a joy-filled servant of Christ helped one man retool his understanding of God and find new joy in his journey with that God.

1. Has anyone ever made a statement about some aspect of God with which you took issue? What did you feel at the time? What actions did you take to explore the discomfort within you?
2. Do you have a person in your life who exemplifies some aspect of God you struggle to understand? How is your relationship with that person helping you to change your thinking in this matter?
3. In what ways does our theology (what we think about God) impact our spirituality (what we do with that knowledge)? Do you think it's possible to enjoy a healthy, growing relationship with God with an inadequate theology?
4. Pray every day this week that God might reveal to you weak spots in your own image of God. Ask him to guide you to someone who exemplifies clarity in those weak spots and can walk with you into greater wholeness and understanding.



A tip of the hat to Doug Rosenau for an unflinching foray into one of Christianity's least discussed topics: sexual intimacy. Here, he explores how maturity can function as catalyst for sustaining passionate sexual exploration well into our senior years.

In keeping with our other articulate writers on the subject, Rosenau adds his voice to the mounting chorus of those who loudly proclaim that age does not guarantee wisdom. Rosenau believes that, although "age doesn't always bring with it maturity," it can actually enhance sexual intimacy with our partner.

Seven concepts frame his thinking on the subject of sex and aging. Maturity accepts and even welcomes our imperfections. We are not threatened by uncertainties or ambiguity but learn to feel at ease in complexity and even disorder. Second, says Rosenau, "Maturity postpones immediate pleasure for long-term gain." The richest rewards are gained over time. As we mature, we become

It is much more common
to experience heart-change
through an encounter with a
radical life than a radical idea.

more comfortable with our limitations and exchange being sexy for being sensual. Our maturity can nurture the attitude that “success is not a destination but an excursion,” which in turn guides us toward ever-deeper connection with our partner and ourselves. Finally, he concludes that cultivating a pervasive gratitude makes us instantly more happy and, frankly, more attractive!

1. Do you agree with Rosenau’s assumption that age doesn’t always bring with it maturity? How do you see yourself maturing as you age? Where are your “weak spots” that require attention? How do those places contribute or steal from sexual intimacy?
2. Are you and your partner becoming comfortable with your “imperfections”? Your “limitations”? If not, are there ways for you to begin the process of loving acceptance of those?
3. How has sexual intimacy changed for you and your partner over the years? Does your deepening friendship enhance that intimacy? How?
4. How are you growing in gratitude? Look for the ways that gratitude contributes to sexual enjoyment and intimacy.

GROWING OLDER

DR. LARRY CRABB



In this article, Dr. Crabb culls from his years of study and practice as a psychologist and as a disciple of Christ to say basically this: at any age, our best self emerges from the chrysalis of Christ-in-me and the degree to which we embrace that reality. “How I live my remaining years will not be determined by what happens to me but rather by my deepening awareness of what

“At any age, our best self emerges from the chrysalis of Christ-in-me and the degree to which we embrace that reality.”

the gospel of Christ is stirring within me,” he declares boldly.

In so doing, he investigates what choices need to be made in his waning years. Will they become a tightening noose around his neck, choking the life out of him? Or, will they provide the means by which he and others experience God’s ever-expanding grace?

Dr. Crabb shares three crucial ways he continues to discover necessary for soulful living as we grow older. First, age does not guarantee wisdom. It only provides the opportunity to gain it. A dispassionate and grace-filled objectivity doesn’t necessarily mean “acedia” or apathy. Second, he insists that doubts never outpace or foil God’s deepening work in the soul. He states, “I want to walk through the doorway of doubt to discover... living truth.” Finally, wherever we may be in the long, often-dark road toward the twilight of our days, we need never fear that God will not envelop us in the warming embrace of wise and caring community.

1. Crabb suggests that the boredom he experiences may actually be creating new opportunities for self-discovery. As you grow older, do you see an “acedia” or boredom beginning to set in? How are you seeking to understand it? Are there others who can help you to see it as the invitation it is to a deeper living in grace?
2. Do you sometimes experience doubts, even as an aging saint? What practices might you invoke to help you embrace those doubts and, in so doing, “plow the soil in which the seeds of wisdom grow”?
3. In what ways can you strive to grow into the kind of older person who can nourish and strengthen others? Are you actively looking for such relationships?
4. A Prayer:
“Create in me an ever-yearning heart,
an ever-learning mind,
and an ever-leaning trust, O God,
to the blessing of others and to the glory of God. Amen.”

THE CRISIS OF MENTORSHIP

KURT WILLEMS



Pastor Kurt Willems shares deeply probing thoughts in response to this statement: “When mentors seem to give up on you, it makes you want to give up on yourself.” Ouch.

He defines a crisis of mentorship in this way: “Too often mentorship becomes something like *mold-er-ship*: trying to create clones who create more clones.” Speaking for his own millennial generation, he maintains that their greatest need is to become more fully human, something only possible under a cloak of complete **safety**—to fail, succeed, differ, doubt, and to ask the taboo questions.

In mentors, millennials seek those who live patterns of **lifelong discovery** that models commitment to growth, **mutuality** that models humility, **patience** that shows tenacity, and **intentionality**, allowing the process of transformation to be “more like a journey and less like an agenda item.”

He offers five nonnegotiables for mentors of millennials. Most important, nothing should be off limits. Ever. Second, don’t be too quick to douse the youthful fires of idealism with cold rationalism.

Third, the ideal mentor is also a lifelong learner. Fourth, says Willems, when “equality of choice is lacking, the mentor becomes a mere dispenser of information rather than a means towards united transformation.” He is looking for some genuine give and take, the kind experienced in life’s best and most lasting relationships. Fifth, to be a mentor one must believe he or she has something to offer another.

Kurt’s deeply longing heart is plainly visible here. He summarizes by saying, “If I were to boil it all down, the one thing that saw me through one of the darkest moments of my twenties was mentorship.”

1. Can you recall a particularly challenging time in your life when a mentor’s presence was helpful? How did that relationship help you adjust to the circumstances, and even overcome them?
2. Have you had an unpleasant experience with a mentor? How did you find your way to freedom and emotional health again afterwards?
3. Do you presently enjoy the blessing of a mentoring relationship in your life? How has that relationship benefited you personally? Professionally?
4. Do you sense a call to become a mentor to someone else? If so, whom? Is your mentor assisting you in finding and developing that relationship?

A SEASON OF MYSTERY

PAULA HUSTON



Nothing really prepares us for the explosive realities of life on the downside of life’s steep mountain. Old age, whether a good or bad experience, is always shrouded in mystery and the unknown.

“How I live my remaining years will not be determined by what happens to me but rather by my deepening awareness of what the gospel of Christ is stirring within me.”

The abiding myths, common to all cultures, of staying on top of my game and my image, proffers the lie that life will be better with more of this or that. Either myth denies us the opportunity to fully embrace our own selves in God’s nonfortuitous grace. It is the ubiquitous myth of the fountain of youth from which we may drink and live forever, eternally broken children forever denied the everlasting joys of the resurrected life.

In old age, Huston insists, we will be faced with challenges so great that only the combined wisdom of our years can offer us sufficient foundation upon which to continue building our lives. We must not be deceived into believing that *chronos* equals *kairos*, that age promises wisdom. We must choose to thrive, not just survive, old age. Huston challenges us to claim our best, most admirable life, despite the temptations of the “enviable” one. Moreover, she invites us to consider the broader eschatological context for our lives: “Through Christ... we have been freed from the grim quest to satisfy every desire.”

Paula gives a number of anti-aging practices designed to help us all grab hold of the fullest Jesus-life

available to us in our waning years. She ends with a most encouraging observation: “One of the most beautiful teachings of Christianity... is the assurance that we are never alone on this difficult earthly journey.” Thanks be to God!

1. On what side of “the hill” do you perceive yourself to be? Do you feel more or less “alive” now than you did twenty years ago? If so, how? If not, why do you think this is?
2. Do you sometimes catch yourself succumbing to cultural temptations toward bettering your game or your image? Can you think of ways to counteract such temptations?
3. How can you begin to live your life more “eschatologically”, that is, in preparation for meeting God face to face? How could such an attitude assist you in your day-to-day struggles?
4. Wherever you are in your chronological journey, purpose to live more *kairotic* (Spirit-fed) lives by means of the disciplines Ms. Huston offers here.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Robert Rife is was born in Calgary, Alberta, but presently serves as minister of worship & music at Yakima Covenant Church in Yakima, Washington. He is a singer-songwriter (his CD, “Be That As It May” is

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